

Barnet's lethargy leads to downfall

Barnet 0
Wycombe W. 1

A GLUM Billy Meadows wore a puzzled frown after Barnet's feeble first-half display had led to their 1-0 FA Trophy (first round) defeat by Wycombe Wanderers at Underhill on Saturday.

Said manager Meadows: "What better motivation can players have than the chance to progress to a Wembley final — I had to read the riot act at half-time, before we started to play."

by John Pollard

"We knew that Wycombe were a highly capable outfit, but any side will look good if you allow them to dictate as we did in the first half," added Meadows.

Barnet showing more determination after the interval, could not break the domination of former Hendon star Alan Phillips, who was an inspiration at the heart of the Wycombe defence.

Ted Powell, manager of Rothmans Isthmian League title-chasers Wycombe, was delighted with his side's performance.

"We had the better scoring chances in a game of two contrasting phases," said Powell.

"After we dictated the first half, Barnet took charge. But our central defenders Alan Phillips and Keith Mead did a magnificent job."

Dilemma

Meadows was faced with a dilemma with midfield men Bob McNab and Paul Blackaller not available.

McNab sustained a pulled calf muscle in an eve-of-the-match training stint with First Division West Ham, and Blackaller was indisposed.

Left with two options — to call up Barry Bolton or switch striker Dennis Brown — Meadows decided to move Brown to midfield, and include Mark Tucker in attack.

He had doubts about the ability of Bolton to last out the 90 minutes on heavy ground after only a brief

appearance at Crawley the previous week, following a long spell out of the line-up.

Brown and John Fairbrother have struck up a good understanding, and the breaking up of the partnership when Barnet needed to display their attacking skills did not help the cause.

Tucker, only 18, lacks the experience to time his runs and create width, and it was not until Brown reverted to his accustomed role in the second half that Barnet showed their power.

It soon became apparent that Powell had done his homework thoroughly when he spied on Barnet in their 3-0 replay win at Wealdstone in the previous round.

'Vulnerable'

"Though Barnet played well at Wealdstone, they looked vulnerable to left-wing raids, and I switched Ian Pearson to exploit this," Powell revealed after the game.

Pearson posed problems with dangerous crosses from the left, and it needed some astute covering by Terry Tapping to ease the threat.

Tapping provided Tucker with a first-minute scoring chance — but Tucker volleyed wide!

Wycombe soon threatened, and rangy striker

Howard Kettleborough headed home from a free-kick by Peter Cruse after nine minutes. But referee Alan Turvey (Basingstoke) disallowed the effort for pushing.

Fairbrother, usually devastating in the air, was guilty of a bad miss in the 23rd-minute. Unmarked he failed to connect with a free-kick from Marvin Hinton at close range.

The significance of that miss became evident four minutes later, when Kettleborough gave Wycombe a deserved lead. Kettleborough caught the defence unawares as he came from a deep position to score a powerful header following a corner by Pearson.

Escape

Wycombe's smooth left-wing raids continued to trouble Barnet, who had a remarkable escape after 32 minutes when Walter Lees appeared to handle a cross from Pearson in the box. The infringement went unnoticed by the referee, and there was no appeal from Wycombe.

Cruse (35 minutes) and Pearson (43 minutes) missed gilt-edged opportunities to stretch Wycombe's advantage. As goalkeeper Wilf Woodend advanced, Cruse shot wide, and the

goalkeeper did well to smother Pearson's effort.

The interval blasting from Meadows certainly did the trick as Barnet started the second half in determined style.

Fairbrother was desperately unlucky not to grab a 48th-minute equaliser when goalkeeper John Maskell just managed to fall on the ball as it flashed towards the net.

Diverted

Maskell somehow managed to get in the way of a powerful goal-bound shot from Gary Williams (59 minutes) and Tucker's drive from the rebound was diverted for a corner.

That was Tucker's last involvement; Bolton replaced him, and Brown switched to attack.

Fairbrother was booked for dissent in the 81st minute. After Fairbrother had fouled full-back Paul Birdseye, Mr Turvey signalled a free-kick to Barnet, then realising his mistake, awarded it to Wycombe. Fairbrother was punished for gesticulating his disapproval.

Barnet: Woodend, Oliver, Lees, Hinton, Tapping, Williams, Price, Brown, Fairbrother, Aggo; Tucker (withdrawn), Substitute: Bolton.

Wycombe Wanderers: J. Maskell, P. Birdseye, R. Davies, K. Mead, A. Phillips, J. Priestley, H. Kettleborough, I. Pearson, M. Holtfield, Substitute: A. Horseman.